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Security Information

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THE STRATEGIC USE PATTERN OF LEAD IN THE SOVIET BLOC

In the Soviet bloc lead is used mainly for strategic purposes, and even with this strict allocation strategic requirements are not always met—for example, storage batteries and paints for ships are in short supply. One of the most important applications is its use in lead-acid storage batteries which are required in all mobile military equipment which includes trucks, tanks, and self-propelled guns, as well as submarines and torpedoes. They are also essential to the operation of telecommunications and signal equipment. These uses absorb nearly all of the bloc's battery production, as the output of civilian automobiles is small. Thus, the storage battery industry is one of prime military importance.

Other strategic Soviet bloc applications of lead include: sheathing for underground communications and power cables; bearings which have some use in nearly every type of machine and engine, and substantial use especially in tanks, trucks, and railway rolling stock (the last two of which are used interchangeably for military and civilian purposes); small arms ammunition; high-octane gasoline (used by at least half of the bloc's total aircraft inventory); weights for ballast in submarines and torpedoes; radiation shields for atomic energy development; chemical equipment (pipes, tubes, etc.) used for various strategic purposes including the production of chemical warfare toxic agents; chemicals for detonators; solder; and paints for the rust-proofing of ships.

Lead consumed for all these strategic uses in the Soviet bloc in 1952 is estimated to have substantially exceeded 100,000 metric tons. Domestic production of lead-acid storage batteries is known to be inadequate, due primarily to insufficient supplies of lead. The alkaline storage battery industry has not been sufficiently developed to alleviate the shortage. Specific shortages of lead have been reported in the East German wire and cable, bearing, and paint industries, and in the Hungarian wire and cable industry. Strategic industries have first priority for the bloc's inadequate supply of lead.

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